BBC NEWS

France moves to stop bus attacks

The French government is holding an emergency meeting on transport security after youths set a bus ablaze on Saturday, critically injuring a woman.

The attack in the southern city of Marseille left 26-year-old Mama Galledou from Senegal with burns to nearly 70% of her body.

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin appealed for witnesses to the attack.

Masked youths have set several buses ablaze, a year after riots by gangs mainly of African and Arab origin.

Both Mr de Villepin and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy pledged that the Marseille perpetrators would be tracked down and punished. About 200 extra police were deployed in the city.

A group of teenagers reportedly forced open the doors of the vehicle and threw an inflammable liquid inside before fleeing.

About 200 vehicles were set alight in incidents around the country on Saturday, and nearly 50 people were arrested.

The French news agency AFP said youths in Grenoble threw a stone from a bridge onto a tram, smashing the window and injuring the driver.

Last year's riots were sparked by the deaths of two teenagers in a suburb of Paris. There is dispute over whether they were chased by police before they were electrocuted while hiding in an electricity substation.

During the violence last year - between youths of mainly North African origin and police - more than 10,000 cars were set ablaze and 300 buildings firebombed.

Community leaders in run-down French suburbs have warned that the factors which played a key part in the riots - high unemployment, racial discrimination and youth alienation from mainstream society - remain unchanged.

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